# Being and becoming native: a methodological enquiry into doing anthropology at home

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## Abstract

In this article, I discuss the fact that doing "anthropology at home" involves the same core anthropological methodology as undertaking research abroad. This implies that while doing anthropology at home may have some advantages concerning field practicalities but is equally challenging. There are certain ethical and methodological essentials involved in every anthropological research undertaking. Through my personal experiences of conducting ethnography in Pakistan, I explain that doing anthropology at home does not make exceptions for the researcher in terms of these ethical and methodological aspects.

KEYWORDS: anthropology at home, positionality, ethnography, history of anthropology, research methodology, Pakistan

## Introduction

Anthropology at home is not as easy a concept to define as its name seems to suggest. Anthropologists generally refer to this term as studying one's own culture, usually by conducting fieldwork in one's own country (Jackson 1987; Munthali 2001; Peirano 1998). Considering the origin of anthropology in the West and the way it has developed over time, doing anthropology at home has given some new dimensions to the discipline. However, some methods of data collection are essential to almost every ethnographic research endeavour; for example, observations, interviews, and informal discussions. These methods are applied in a variety of ways, depending upon the objectives of the research and practicalities of the field, among other considerations. Ethnographic research provides an in-depth and qualitative insight into human behaviour by using valid and reliable methods of data collection. In this article, I discuss my personal experiences of doing anthropology at home in Pakistan while studying at and affiliated with a British university. I aim to highlight that doing anthropology at home is a different context of the single discipline (Peirano 1998) but it does not deviate from the core anthropological methodology. Doing anthropology at home may have some advantages in terms of field practicalities, but is equally challenging.

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People's experience of social conditions is very subjective, which requires an extensive engagement of the researcher with the community. Such an engagement gives rise to some concerns over the researcher's conduct and bias. I will reflect upon my positionality in relation to the community I worked with to highlight some constraints as well as the opportunities of doing anthropology at home in Pakistan. My research experience in Pakistan, being a native, at academic and professional levels helped me in familiarising myself with the regional cultures and local issues across many areas in the country.[1] I used the learning from these experiences during my fieldwork for the PhD project, which was carried out in 2010 in Lodhran District for approximately ten months (Mughal 2014a). The study focused on the social organisation of time and space in relation to urbanisation and industrialisation in the rural context of Southern Punjab. Before discussing my personal reflections on the practicalities of fieldwork during this project, I will briefly describe the development of anthropology at home as a particular dimension in anthropological research. After that, I will demonstrate, from my personal experiences, that doing anthropology at home requires the similar set of protocols, as does researching a country other than one's own.

## Anthropology at home

Ever since the initial anthropological studies in the second half of the 19th century (Jackson 1987), many critics have associated anthropology with colonialism. The discipline has been linked with the expansion of Western influences in the non-Western world and the ways through which the former controls the latter (Lewis 1973). This is chiefly because European and American researchers always lead the discipline by conducting fieldwork in the so-called "remote" and "exotic" cultures (Hayano 1979). Although anthropologists started conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Western countries soon after the Second World War, it gained popularity from the 1960s onwards. This trend of studying one's own culture in the West had economic and political reasons, including the decrease in research funding and the reduced availability of jobs at the universities (Fahim & Hermer 1980). Nonetheless, Western anthropologists did not entirely cease studying non-Western cultures. They continued studying "Others", often in their respective former colonies for some political and historical reasons. British former colonies, which had joined the Commonwealth, became a preferred destination for many British anthropologists. In North America and Australia, however, Others had been living at home in the form of Amerindians or Aboriginals, respectively, with their exotic cultures (Messerschmidt 1981; Morton 1999). Therefore, anthropology at home was intertwined with the study of Others there. The debates and discussions regarding the definition of home in anthropology at home have been a critical point in the discipline (cf. Greenhouse 2013). The varied definitions of home range from a territorial classification, such as a country or a region, to legal and political categories, such as citizenship and identity of anthropologists and the communities they work in.

[1] After receiving MSc in anthropology from Quaid-i-Azam University, I worked in the development sector where I had an opportunity to travel across Pakistan.

In Britain, the need to study one's own culture and society was felt as early as before the Second World War. The Mass Observation project in the 1930s is an early example in which anthropologists and journalists called upon the social investigation of everyday life in Britain (cf. Hubble 2006). There is also a great deal of anthropological literature from the 1950s and the 1960s studying British culture at home (e.g. Emmett 1964; Firth 1956; Frankenberg 1957). British anthropologists are now increasingly conducting their research within Britain because of some financial issues and restrictions imposed by the funding bodies. It also has a policy dimension; for example, anthropologists study Asian and African diasporas to inform the policies related to immigration and multiculturalism in the United Kingdom. The categorisation of these studies on diasporas is complicated. Hutnyk (2005) has noted that these studies can be variously and or simultaneously termed as anthropology at home, "homeless anthropology", or "anthropology of others". Another reason is the increased academic and political interest of major donors, such as the European Union, to undertake research within Europe. This has led to a decreased interest and lesser opportunities for European anthropologists to study non-Western countries.

The perceived and real threats to security in various parts of the world, either Western or non-Western, have given rise to concerns over conducting fieldwork abroad. The safety risk for Western researchers in travelling and living in small villages of non-Western countries is "perceived" to be even higher in the post 9/11 scenario. Therefore, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advises against travelling to many countries, including Pakistan, at least to some parts of the country (GOV.UK 2015). British universities are bound to conform to FCO policies in order to allow researchers to carry out research overseas. On the one hand, these unfavourable circumstances are leading towards a decline in the interest to study others. On the other hand, these conditions encourage British anthropologists to study their own culture. Another possibility for anthropologists is to use only secondary information, as Werbner (2010) proposes, to rely on the journalistic information about the places where conducting fieldwork appears to be risky in the post 9/11 scenario. This might suit an "arm-chair" analysis to some extent, but will undermine the strength of anthropology, which lies in the analysis of social conditions through ethnography.

Anthropology as a discipline is gaining popularity in non-Western countries. Furthermore, Western countries fund various developmental projects, for example, through the agencies like DFID and USAID, which seek to involve local researchers in their projects. This encouragement to recruit local researchers is due to the non-feasibility of Western researchers to work on short-term and low paid projects in areas with a security risk. The sustainability of such projects is contingent upon the participation of local researchers and communities. The popularity of participatory approaches has helped applied anthropology to flourish by encouraging it as a profession in non-Western countries. The doctoral students from non-Western countries studying anthropology in Western ones carry out their research projects in their home countries or their respective diasporas in host countries. This trend can easily be observed by visiting any postgraduate conference in the West (cf. Handley et al. 2012; Mughal 2011, 2013). The anthropology students after being trained at Western universities return to their home countries because of either fewer job opportunities in Western countries or contractual agreement with their home

universities. Many universities in non-Western countries have established anthropology departments and research institutes. Consequently, there is an increase in the number of local anthropologists working in these countries either in academia or in NGOs.

Anthropologists, especially those from Britain, have been carrying out research in South Asia since the colonial era, studying social organisation, caste, religion, and political organisation (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown 1922; Hutton 1946). As mentioned earlier, Britain's interest in Commonwealth nations has made South Asia a favourite destination for British anthropologists to undertake research. Pakistan is an important country in the Commonwealth as well as in the Muslim World from a geopolitical perspective, not merely limited to the cold war era and the on-going war on terrorism. The state of affairs regarding anthropology and the number of Western anthropologists travelling to Pakistan is not different from the aforementioned scenario regarding non-Western countries in general. However, because of the so-called "war on terrorism" and the stereotyping of Pakistan in the Western media (cf. Bousfield & Catrin 2013; CIL 2009; Oborne 2012), the number of Western anthropologists doing fieldwork in Pakistan is continuously decreasing. Recently, the emphasis of the Pakistani government on higher education has encouraged Pakistani anthropologists and students to carry out fieldwork in the country. This has, to some extent, filled the gap of the full or partial absence of Western anthropologists researching Pakistan.

## Encountering the field

Ethnographic research is about and by human beings. It is, therefore, important to consider ethical issues before entering the field. Currently, there is no official association for anthropologists in Pakistan, and no specific ethical guidelines are available for fieldworkers. My training as anthropologist always helped me in dealing with any ethical concern in the field. My personal insight into Pakistani society and its cultural diversity helped me overcome any difficult situation with reference to ethics. For instance, conflicts may arise in so many different ways in different cultures that the knowledge of local traditions and customs comes in handy in such situations. I made every effort to follow the ethical guidelines for good research practice set by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA 1999) and the code of ethics developed by the American Anthropological Association (AAA 1998) to deal with any ethical issue during this research.

This project was carried out in the Punjab province. In order to study the social organisation of time and space, I was open to work in any region in Pakistan because the project's theoretical framework did not demand any particular area. Although I am native to the Punjab Province, I had never visited Lodhran prior to this fieldwork. A few points regarding the selection of the field site and ethics have been particularly important for me. Firstly, Punjab is a relatively secure and peaceful province of Pakistan in contrast to some regions in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and tribal areas, particularly with reference to war on terrorism. Secondly, I wanted to work in Punjab to save the time that could be otherwise required for learning a new regional language at a proficient level. I had no problem in communicating with people in Lodhran, as I am fluent in the Urdu,

Saraiki, and Punjabi languages. Thirdly, I wanted to work in the area new to me so that I could explore its culture as an "outsider" and would not overlook some of the usual things that a regular visitor or native might otherwise overlook. Fourthly, there is a good deal of anthropological literature available on the Punjab in general (e.g. Donnan 1988; Eglar 1960; Lyon 2004) but fewer studies have been carried out in the southern part. Fifthly, Lodhran is not a well-known town and has been relatively safe from terrorism, and ethnic and sectarian violence compared to big cities such as Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar.

A critical and more practical reason behind selecting Lodhran was that my father had personal contacts in the city as he had been working there in a government department. When I discussed my plans to carry out fieldwork in a village, he suggested Lodhran as a field site, because he thought his personal contacts could be useful in this regard. I told Muhammad Akram, one of my father's colleagues and friends, by telephone the purpose of my research before going to Lodhran. My preference was any rural area close to the city with an increasing literacy rate, urbanisation, and economic development alongside its indigenous patterns of rural life. After discussing with his friends from different villages in Lodhran, Akram suggested Sumra Union Council as a field site for my research. Working in this Union Council was also feasible because there I could obtain accommodation and some initial contacts along with other requirements about the area suitable for my research. I was impressed with the hospitality of the people upon my arrival. I have been visiting many villages and urbanising towns in Punjab for many years and can now easily distinguish between the villages remote from big cities with respect to their infrastructure, technological facilities available for agriculture, and the availability of other modern day amenities. I finally decided to work in this area and stayed with Zafar Chaudhry, a staff member at the Agriculture Field Office, who was very well familiar with the area and the community.

A Union Council in Pakistan has a considerably large area to work in for an ethnographic project. A rural Union Council typically comprises of more than one mauzas (Revenue Villages) having several spatially distinct settlements. I selected Jhokwala Village as a field site, which was located closer to my accommodation. The village is spread over one square kilometre with about one hundred and fifty households.

From the methodological perspective, there were some important considerations behind selecting Jhokwala for this study. Firstly, Jhokwala is a medium-sized settlement in terms of its area and population in comparison with other settlements in the Union Council. The village is accessible via road and is located beside the junction of national highways connecting various parts of the country. It has an increasing education rate, having at least four schools within Jhokwala or in its proximity. Secondly, the location of the village on the main road allowed me to interact with people from other villages, having a first-hand account of conflicts in those villages without directly involving myself in their affairs. I never disclosed the comments and remarks of one party to another or even to anyone within or outside the village. I typically avoided inviting two opponent parties to a single group discussion, which could invoke serious tensions, to the detriment of my reputation in the community. Thirdly, the two major ethnic groups, Saraiki-speaking locals and Urdu-speaking muhajirs (migrants) living in two separate settlements, demarcated by

a road, make this village more interesting.[2] Thirdly, small villages like Jhokwala are relatively safe and peaceful with fewer prospects of making the news for terrorists. Fourthly, land disputes are common occurrences in the rural areas of Pakistan (Lyon 2004). It is difficult to find any area with no such disputes at all. This village had fewer conflicts than some other villages in the area; therefore, it was obviously a safe place to work.

## Engagement with the community

Developing rapport with a new community is the first challenge for an anthropologist. It requires patience and being respectful of local norms and values. I used my native language skills and prior knowledge of the local culture of Southern Punjab to acquaint myself with local people. I explained the purpose and focus of my research to the staff members of the Agriculture Office and to my initial contacts in the community. Farmers used to visit the Agriculture Field Office to seek advice for their crops. This provided me with an opportunity to familiarise myself with farmers. Zafar Chaudhry introduced me to some local residents, shopkeepers in the local market, and officials of the Union Council, hospital, and health clinics, setting a way forward for my research. The staff at the Agriculture Department and Union Council offices helped in socialising me with people from different villages. I explained my research to all the people I met in the initial days of my fieldwork. I remained in touch with some of them throughout my research as they helped me developing further contacts. Rao Tahir, Muhammad Athar, and Sajjad Ahmed became my good friends. Tahir and Sajjad are the principals of Al-Akbar Public School, Jhokwala and Al-Faisal Model School at Adda Parmat, respectively. Athar is an employee at the local hospital and lives in a village near to Jhokwala. They helped me develop more contacts and build rapport. The Agriculture Field Office, schools, men's socialising places, and the Adda Parmat market were among the places from where I developed contacts with more people over time.

Within a couple of month of entering the field, people started recognising me because I was easily noticeable while interviewing and visiting various places like mosques, the cemetery, schools, offices, and the Adda Parmat market. When I approached them to ask for an interview or to have an informal discussion, they frequently agreed. This had a snowball effect, and I met more people with the help of my initial interviewees. They also helped me in developing rapport in the community and in participating in their social activities. I found elderly people and children particularly enthusiastic about interviews and photography, respectively. Whenever I asked children about someone's address in the village, they walked with me in a group to the address.

I was simultaneously an outsider as well as an insider in the field. I was an insider because I am a Pakistani and belong to the Punjab Province and, to be precise, from the same part of the Punjab where Lodhran is located. Nevertheless, issues regarding the

[2] After Partition in 1947, the people who migrated from India to Pakistan are known as muhajirs. In order to distinguish between the migrants and those already living here, the term muhajir is used for the former whereas locals is used for the latter. Both the groups use these terms for each other (cf. Alavi 1989; Rahman 1997; Siddiqi 2012).

identity and affiliation of an anthropologist do not conclude here. Multi-faceted notions of identities in terms of gender, age, social and economic statuses, appearance, political affiliation, and language take this discussion further. There are many layers and strings attached to these notions. Pakistanis love discussing politics. I do not have an affiliation with any political party in Pakistan. Therefore, I remained neutral during the discussions on politics. This strategy helped me make good friends without any controversial stances on the issues that might be sensitive for some of them. Being fluent in native languages and aware of the social values of how to behave in different situations helped me find a quicker and efficient way for 'settling in' after entering the field (Bernard 2011: 156). It also helped me collect valid, reliable, and "inside" information.

Rural Pakistanis are welcoming and friendly. I always respected the local norms, for instance, paying respect to elders, even if they were strangers, with a humble attitude, and not talking to women in the public spaces. I mostly wore Pakistani shalwar qameez (traditional long shirt with loose trouser) but also wore jeans and t-shirts at times, which are trendy among youth and have considerable social acceptability in rural areas. I developed friendships with young people and children, sometimes by taking photographs and making videos of them in sports activities. It was not possible to conduct interviews with women, with a few exceptions. I was also an outsider in the field because Lodhran is not my hometown. I was new to local people and they, too, were new to me, as I had never been to this district prior to this fieldwork. In this way, while country and province related me with Lodhran as an insider, I was an outsider for the city in the meantime. Studying in the UK grants one a prestigious status in Pakistan. I was well received by officials or businesspersons in Lodhran City, particularly if they knew I was studying in the UK. They all met me with generous hospitality. In the village, local residents quickly notice anyone new to their area, regardless of whether they are a Pakistani or a foreigner. One is more noticeable if one is hanging out in residential settlements and meeting with people in public places in an interview-like situation.

An increasing number of NGOs are working in different parts of the country. Most of the NGOs work on microfinance and community physical infrastructure schemes. Most NGOs have their offices in cities and send surveyors to rural areas to conduct rapid rural appraisals, need assessments, and to determine project feasibility. For many of the people that I met in the field, their first impression was that I was a social worker and had come there to work on a project. During our initial conversations, they always asked what kind of projects or schemes I was going to suggest to the higher authorities. They also pointed out particular problems regarding sewerage, health, and agriculture that they thought should be addressed. It took me longer to explain that I was not meant to work on some community development project. However, this helped me know about the problems faced by the people in the village. Similarly, my stay at the Agriculture Office gave an impression to many that I was there to work on their crops and that I would only be asking about the diseases and yields of their crops. Knowing all these issues, I spent a lot of time with people in the mosque, at men's socialising places, children's playgrounds, and in the market right from the initial days of my research so that I could maximum socialise with people to make them realise the nature of my research different than an NGO project.

## Data collection

A single PhD project is not sufficient to study the process of sociocultural change spread over decades or even centuries, due to temporal and budgetary constraints. However, a cross-sectional analysis of variations in the cultural patterns at a given point in time can help understand the process of social change (Woods 1975). Following this approach, I used various methods for collecting the information about the physical layout of the village, socioeconomic conditions, and the social organisation of time and space (see Mughal 2014b, in press-a, in press-b). I used questionnaires for women whom I could not directly interview to document their time allocation and spatial knowledge. Women themselves or a male member of the household asking the women the relevant questions, completed these questionnaires.

In order to record most of the information collected during fieldwork, anthropologists rely on their jottings and fieldnotes to use later while writing down their research. It is, nonetheless, difficult to take jottings or write fieldnotes during the flow of conversation. How, when, and what to jot is a critical decision to make. However, being engaged with the community at a ceremony or accompanying someone during the mundane activities provides an opportunity for participation more than just observation. Doing anthropology at home and familiarity with native languages and local culture helped me building rapport in the community. Nevertheless, most local terminologies and various contexts of field realities needed an efficient recording. I jotted on paper and sometimes used my digital recorder to record the observations or relevant local terms in my own voice. I used this technique to save time and to avoid the difficulty of writing down when it was not feasible, such as while walking.

Some people were reluctant to talk when they saw a notepad in my hand whereas others felt privileged when they knew that the information they were providing was so valuable to me. Initially, I used my personal judgement on when to take notes in front of people. I adopted the strategy that suited them in particular. At times, I let myself go with the flow of participation and relied upon my memory. If taking notes was not instantly possible, I used "headnotes" to recall while writing the fieldnotes (Ottenberg 1990). Fieldnotes are a more formal and mature record of information and observation than jottings are. Many anthropologists prefer writing fieldnotes by the end of any fieldwork activity or after a day or even a week. I chose to do the same. I wrote fieldnotes by the end of a day or the start of the next day, temporarily detaching myself each day from 'cultural immersion' (Bernard 1998: 137). The fieldnotes were not highly systematic as I anticipated prior to my fieldwork, but they were sufficiently neat and organised to be used for analysis afterwards. I arranged them thematically, whenever and wherever possible, mainly into the categories of history, geography, calendars, places, agriculture, and economic information. I wrote down the case studies separately. Some of these were developed along the course of the data collection.

Using computers in anthropological research started as early as the 1970s (Dyke 1981), and has faced some criticism, too (Kippen & Bel 1989). The reluctance to use computers in research is linked to the nature of ethnographic data, which is sometimes

argued to be more complex, qualitative, and subjective. The use of computers in anthropological research has increased significantly in its ability to manage data and analyse complex datasets and understand the relationships between different variables, qualitatively as well as quantitatively; it is more than the mere presentation of data (Fischer 1994; Lyon & Fischer 2006; Lyon & Magliveras 2006; White & Jorion 1992). During the fieldwork, it was difficult for me to use my computer in the village at a time when Pakistan is experiencing serious energy shortfalls, and rolling blackouts, also referred to as "load-shedding", for a couple of hours or longer are common once or twice in a day. I used a portable solar panel and a rechargeable battery to keep my electrical equipment working. It helped me in writing the questionnaires and printing them out as an efficient time management. I regularly backed up my audio, video, and other digital data in my laptop and an external disk drive. One of the main reasons for staying at the Agriculture Field Office was the availability of computers and the Internet, relatively uncommon tools in the rural areas of Pakistan. This helped me remain current through with the information relating to various Pakistani organisations. I accessed the secondary information from the websites of the Government of Pakistan, local and international organisations, and newspapers.

## Departing from the field

During the fieldwork, anthropologists are 'more or less contemporaneous with the events, experience, and interactions they describe or recount' (Emerson et al. 2001: 353). After leaving the field, they have to rely on their memories and fieldnotes to write about their experiences and observations about the community they have been living with. What was most important for me was not only my knowledge about the area and relevant cultural domains but also that the voices of local people be appropriately present in the research reports and thesis. Although I was aware of many local terminologies, being a native, I made sure that I had enough information about the village, local terminologies, and the cultural concepts of time and space before leaving the field.

## Conclusion

Doing research in a Third World country has some issues with respect to resources available for fieldwork and access to various segments of the society due to some cultural and political constraints (Bulmer & Warwick 1993). Therefore, this fieldwork was challenging in the context of my own "positionality", such as in terms of ethnicity and gender (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Furthermore, every society has its own cultural norms and values to which an anthropologist has to respond reflexively and act appropriately. There are certain ethical concerns to be considered in order to carry out ethnographic research while being engaged with people as well as analysing and writing about them. Broadly speaking, these ethical concerns include the issues of consent, privacy, bias, appropriate research methods, correct reporting, being honest, and the proper use of information (Patton 1990). I have shown here that doing anthropology at home does not make exceptions for the researchers in this regard.

Increasingly, researchers from non-Western countries studying at Western institutions are doing anthropology at home, i.e. in their home countries. To an extent, this has changed the ways anthropologists have traditionally studied others and the way anthropology makes its "object" (Fabian 1983). When a researcher studies his or her own people, the definition of other may be negotiated. However, following ethnographic methodology demands particular skills and management that may be invariable between doing research in one's own as well as any other country. Conventional anthropological methods, such as participation observation that were initially tools to get "insider" information are equally valid when doing anthropology at home. These methods are required to obtain empirical evidence to make cross-cultural comparisons by using the vocabulary shared across the discipline. A systematic use of research methods broadens the chances of making discoveries about human behaviour for an anthropologist studying own culture. However, rationalities involved in managing research in the field may be different for a native and foreign researchers based on their prior knowledge of local conditions. These advantages of doing anthropology at home does not undermine the importance of doing "anthropology of others" or abroad that also has a potential of methodological innovativeness in making discoveries. An increased interest in participatory approaches has further blurred the boundaries of a methodological distinction between doing anthropology at home or abroad.

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## Povzetek

V članku obravnavam dejstvo, da izvajanje "antropologije doma" vključuje isto jedrno antropološko metodologijo kot izvajanje raziskovanja v tujini. To nakazuje, da ima izvajanje antroplogije doma morda nekatere prednosti glede izvajanja terenskih raziskovalnih opravil, hkrati pa je enako zahtevno. V vsakem antropološkem raziskovanju je potrebno upoštevati določene etične in metodološke pogoje, skozi osebne izkušnje izvajanja etnografije v Pakistanu pa želim pokazati, da v tem pogledu izvajanje antropologije doma za raziskovalca ni nič drugačno klasičnega izvajanja stran od doma.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: antropologija doma, pozicionaliteta, etnografija, zgodovina antropologije, raziskovalna metodologija, Pakistan

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